



Steven K. Young, Director

Department Seeks to Strengthen Iowa's Food Safety Laws

DES MOINES, IOWA (December 15, 2006) – Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals (DIA) Director Steve Young today said he is again asking the Iowa Legislature to strengthen the state's food inspection laws by incorporating the latest version of the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) Food Code. "If Iowa wants to remain at the forefront of consumer protection, it's essential that the 2005 Food Code be adopted as the state's food safety standard," Director Young said. Iowa's current food safety standards are based on the 1997 Food Code, which was adopted by the Iowa General Assembly in 1998.

"The FDA updates the Food Code every four years to provide best practices for the retail and food service industries (restaurants, grocery stores, vending, and institutions such as nursing homes) on how to prevent foodborne illness," Young explained. "The FDA updates the Food Code to reflect current science and emerging food safety issues."

With the recent media attention focusing on the foodborne illness outbreaks in Iowa and across the nation, DIA's food inspectors and the local health departments with which it contracts need to have the latest food safety guidance as the basis for their inspection standards, the Director noted. "The 2005 Food Code contains updated recommendations dealing with Norovirus, food allergens, and handwashing procedures to minimize potential contamination of ready-to-eat foods. If we want to serve as the consumer's frontline defense against foodborne illness, we need to adopt the latest version of the Food Code," Young stated.

Among the more significant changes included in the 2005 Food Code are new and expanded definitions and information dealing with food allergens consistent with the Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act of 2004 (FALCPA). The section dealing with employee health has also been revamped to better address ways to protect public health. The section is based on new science regarding the agents that are most likely to be transmitted from an infected food worker through food.

“Employee health was a contributing factor in the foodborne illness outbreaks investigated last month by the Department’s Food and Consumer Safety Bureau,” the Director said. “The outbreaks at Greenbriar and the West End Diner were linked to an ill food service worker who potentially infected restaurant customers with Norovirus.”

The 2005 Food Code for the first time includes Norovirus among the list of illnesses that are to be reported by a food establishment operator, he continued. Previous versions of the Food Code, including the 1997 edition, require that operators report on the health status of employees and exclude them from the food establishment when they are diagnosed with salmonella typhi, shigella, Escherichia coli O157:H7, or hepatitis A. “Norovirus needs to be included with the reportable illness,” Director Young stated.

The Department’s legislative proposal would permit DIA to adopt by rule the latest version of the FDA’s Food Code, Young said, noting: “There have been three editions of the Food Code published since 1997, the latest in 2005, and a new edition will be published every four years thereafter. Having the specific edition of the Food Code adopted in statute limits the state’s ability to ensure Iowa food establishments meet the most current, scientific food safety standards shown to protect the public against foodborne illness.”

An additional provision in the Department’s proposal will seek to increase the fees charged for establishment licenses. “License fees have only been minimally increased since 1978,” the Director explained. “Each year, as the cost of living increases, the disparity between fees and inspection costs grows. To fully cover regulatory costs, license fees must be adjusted.” The maximum license increase to cover the costs of the required and necessary inspections is approximately \$225 annually for an establishment with yearly gross sales of \$500,000 or more.

“The risk of foodborne illness is of increasing concern due to changes in the global market, aging of our population, increasing numbers of at-risk individuals, and changes in food production practices,” Young said. “Pre-school age children, older adults, and those with impaired immune systems are especially impacted by foodborne illness, which may have serious and long-term consequences. Most seriously, they can be life threatening. The proposal put

forth by the Department is intended to adequately fund and strengthen Iowa's food safety system."

The Department of Inspections and Appeals is responsible for administering and enforcing the state's food and sanitation laws. Through time, and pursuant to legislative direction, DIA has developed a joint state and local inspection program, entering into contracts with counties and cities to perform food inspections for a large portion of the state.

In addition to food establishment inspections, the Department is responsible for inspecting hotel and motels, egg handlers, and food processing plants. DIA also performs sanitation inspections at barber and cosmetology shops.

"Last summer's inspection campaign of more than 550 nail salons, which has already resulted in licensing actions against 10 establishments, was conducted by employees hired, trained, and supervised by DIA's Food and Consumer Safety Bureau," Director Young noted. "Not only does the Department conduct sanitation inspections at barber shops and cosmetology salons, including nail salons, but staff in our Investigations Division conducts professional licensing inquiries under a contract with IDPH's professional licensing boards." Since July 1st, staff in DIA's Professional Standards Unit have completed 33 investigations referred to them by the Iowa Board of Cosmetology Arts and Science Examiners.

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